People in Transit

GERMAN MIGRATIONS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE, 1820–1930

Edited by

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and

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Introduction

DIRK HOERDER

Germany is a country of emigration and immigration. The vast number of departures from port cities was obvious to any nineteenth-century observer. That the German states needed immigrants before the nineteenth century was also self-evident to mercantilist princes and their advisors. Accordingly, Huguenots as well as Salzburg and Bohemian Protestants were welcomed. Only in the twentieth century, or, to be more exact, from the 1880s onward, did attitudes toward in-migrants become ambivalent: Germany needed workers but did not want immigrants. Poles, Ruthenians, Italians, Belgians, and Danes were admitted only as "foreign workers." While German emigrants to Russia, southeastern Europe, North and South America, and elsewhere were proud of their contributions to and economic achievements in other lands, emigrants from other countries to Germany were treated like pariahs, required to carry "legitimizing cards," and forced to leave Germany every autumn. The situation improved after World War II, though in-migrants to Germany were never accepted in the same way as German out-migrants expected to be treated when they went abroad.

In the nineteenth century, Germany had high rates of internal migration. As a consequence, by the 1880s about one-half of the German population did not reside at its place of birth. Changes in agriculture as well as industrialization demanded migration – within a system of changing labor markets – to places where social life was not constricted by marriage regulations, remnants of feudal relations, or the absence of recreational possibilities.

Migration was one of the topics at a 1983 conference in Philadelphia organized on the occasion of the tricentennial of German immigration to the United States. Scholars specializing in the political and cultural history of Germans in America provided a survey of the state of the art.[1] Since

1 Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1985). The notes will, with a few exceptions, list studies

1983 scholars have advanced considerably our knowledge of migration into and out of Germany. Several large projects on German emigration have been completed, two surveys of foreign in-migration to Germany now exist, numerous specialized studies have appeared in print, and, recently, a massive analysis of all migration flows has been concluded. At the end of this volume we will review these projects and the body of work derived from them in a bibliographical essay.

This volume focuses on westward migration from Europe to North America, covers the long century from the 1820s to the 1930s, and takes a broad comparative approach. The three types of migration – in-migration, internal migration, and out-migration – are assumed to be interrelated processes. In addition, German migrants are placed in perspective with Polish, Swedish, and Irish migrations. Moreover, gender is given special emphasis. For organizational purposes, the present volume has been broken into four parts of roughly equal length.

Part I of the volume covers out-migration from Germany. The first contribution, by Walter Kamphoefner, deals with questions of method, findings, and approaches to migration history. This methodological piece is followed by three essays that explore the historical terrain of the East Elbian region of Germany. A comparative study by a Polish scholar on Polish migration patterns concludes this part.

In his essay, Kamphoefner introduces a theme that recurs in many of the later pieces, namely, the causes of migration. The three types of landholding in the German states – large estates, independent peasantry with impartible inheritance, and independent peasantry with equal division of land among inheritors – determined socioeconomic status of the different social strata in the agrarian world. This status and its changes over time help explain the propensity to migrate. The direction of migration depended on proximity to or distance from German centers of industrialization and the emerging labor markets. Whereas agents and guidebooks facilitated rather than caused emigration, personal letters played an extremely important role in promoting this process. The analysis here is mainly concerned with emigration from agricultural sectors. During the last wave of emigration, from 1878 to 1893, however, many migrants came from urban areas. Their role in the United States is analyzed in a case study by Sven Beckert as well as by other essays in Parts III and IV of the volume.

that have appeared since. Only German migrations are covered; publications on Austrians and the Swiss are thus excluded.

Most studies in this volume strongly emphasize economic factors in the motivation of potential migrants to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Yet an important but often overlooked additional factor must be considered, namely, the economic conditions in the place of origin, which provided the structural framework for migration processes. But the decision to depart remained with individuals and/or their families, each assessing the relative opportunities or total absence thereof. There was nothing deterministic about it. Similarly, on the receiving end, the analysis leads many authors to stress the importance of labor markets. Again, knowledge of markets provides only the general framework. Information from the ethnic communities abroad guided immigrants to certain segments of the labor markets. At stake was the securing of material existence in the new world, establishing a material culture, a family "economy," and a community. It is the strength of many of the essays in this collection that the economic framework is related to individual decisions, cultural factors (like religion), gender spheres, traditions of work, and governmental regulations, for example, marriage restrictions or the legal right of estate owners to punish hired hands physically.

Into the mid-1980s scholars in the Federal Republic of Germany neglected the eastern territories of various German states and, since 1871, of the German Reich, areas of considerable in-migration. A seminal essay by Klaus J. Bade and research by the scholars involved in the Chicago project on the German working class as well as the comparative project on female immigrants to Chicago provided a beginning.[2] Most of the German migrants living in the United States during the last third of the nineteenth century came from the German northeast. But until recently, Polish archives in the territories once under German domination were not open to German researchers from either East or West. The situation improved when three scholars from the universities of Rostock and Potsdam developed a research program to study migration in Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, and Pomerania in the nineteenth century (1815–1914) using sophisticated sociohistorical microstudies.

The three essays on East Elbian migration include Rainer Mühle's look at three cases of emigration from West Brandenburg and Pomerania – continental migration from the Potsdam area to Russian Poland (1817–19), from Ruppin County to Russian Poland (1817–19), and overseas migration of Old Lutherans from Uckermark and the "Oderbruch" to the United

2 Klaus J. Bade, "Massenwanderung und Arbeitsmarkt im deutschen Nordosten von 1880 bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg: Überseeische Auswanderung, interne Abwanderung und kontinentale Zuwanderung," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 20 (1980): 265–323.

States in 1843; Axel Lubinski's study of Mecklenburg-Strelitz with its 80,000 inhabitants in 1871 and the emigration of 16,000 people between 1846 and 1914; and Uwe Reich's exploration of continental and overseas migration from East Brandenburg from 1818 to the 1850s. All three studies succeed in presenting references to the complex migration history of these territories. In-migration followed the devastation of the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) and later military conflicts. Swiss colonists and French Huguenots were attracted by settlement subsidies and by privileges for their religious practices. Bohemian dissenters and Salzburg Protestants also came.[3] Out-migration was short-distance, from Mecklenburg to Prussia, medium-distance into Russian Poland – and, in some cases, in secondary long-distance eastward movements to the South Russian plains – or long-distance, intercontinental emigration to Australia and the Americas. There was return migration from Russian Poland and, from the 1890s onward, in-migration of seasonal Polish workers.

In the nineteenth century, war-related underpopulation in the Germanies was replaced by relative overpopulation. The demographic developments, particularly the high rates of reproduction, complicated the transition from feudal and communal arrangements to capitalist agriculture. Commons were divided, and work for rural laborers became more seasonal. Interference of the large landowners and the state in private lives of servants and laborers (*Gesinde*), however, continued. Men and women were subject to corporal punishment by their employers; to marry they had to get permission from the authorities. While the old order remained dominant in social relations, the economic sphere changed under the influence of new forces. Competition with the United States and Russia in the production of grain began to influence the possibilities for earning a living. Decisions about the importation of cloth made in Moscow or elsewhere influenced the amount of food a weaver in an East Elbian village could bring to his family's table. In addition, the revocation of religious privileges granted to colonists who left their culture of origin led to discontent. But these migrants knew that their capability to pay taxes and thus support state interests was sought after. They petitioned the authorities for redress, announcing their intention to migrate further if no improvement in their living conditions was achieved through governmental action. Migration was therefore conceived as a means of escape from oppressive spiritual conditions, constriction of social

3 Stefi Jersch-Wenzel, *Juden und "Franzosen" in der Wirtschaft des Raumes Berlin-Brandenburg zur Zeit des Merkantilismus* (Berlin, 1978); Frédéric Hartweg and Stefi Jersch-Wenzel, eds., *Die Hugenotten und das Refuge: Deutschland und Europa* (Berlin, 1990); *Das Böhmische Dorf in Berlin-Neukölln, 1737–1987: Dem Kelch zuliebe Exulant* (Berlin, 1987).

life, generalized exploitation, and the reality of larger economic cycles. The scholarly debate over the question whether migration is flight as well as militancy – conducted with reference to South Italian peasants – need not be continued for East Elbia.[4] Migration was part of a process of bargaining over the allocation of resources and the resistance to unacceptable conditions imposed either by demographic and economic developments or by political and social systems, as the villagers' petitions show.

To a large extent, the decision to migrate depended on the economic position within the communities. In particular, persons dependent both on wages and on small garden plots were among those who left. They no longer had a place in agriculture that permitted a regular and sufficient income from land as agricultural laborers. It was not always clear whether wages were needed to supplement income from agriculture or whether small plots helped laborers survive on below-subsistence wages. In the first half of the century from 1815 to 1914 much of the migration was family migration; later individual migration dominated. But since the "individuals" were parts of family migration chains, both as regards stem family and family of procreation (marriage migration), this was in fact part of a sequential family migration. These case studies of out-migration from East Elbian areas show the complexity of local social and economic conditions, the impact of international economic down- or upswings, and the range of destinations from which potential migrants selected the one that best suited their aspirations.

Adam Walaszek's analysis of the impact of migration on the Polish economy takes into account the consequences of emigration for the society of origin. Was emigration beneficial or detrimental to the villages and regions in the Polish territories? Given the enormous output of Polish migration research in the last two decades,[5] Walaszek uses microstudies on Ropczyce County and the parish of Zaborow, both in Galicia, in order to achieve an evaluation of, first, the changes in Polish society that led to out-migration, whether temporary or permanent, and, second, the changes that these mass migrations produced. While larger capital flows and investments influenced the overall economic development in the Polish territories, the small flows of emigrant remittances changed living conditions on the local level. Again,

4 Donna R. Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants: Rural Sicilians Become American Workers* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1988).

5 For further information, see the worldwide surveys by Celina Bobinska and Andrej Pilch, eds., *Employment-Seeking Emigrations of the Poles Worldwide in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Cracow, 1975), and Ewa Morawska, "Labor Migrations of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy, 1880–1914," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (1989): 237–72.

migration was also part of resistance movements. Return migrants no longer showed the deference expected of them by priests or (land)lords. Women realized that they had options other than working in subservient positions on the family farm. Communities extended over continents. This localism, so well researched for Italian migrants, led a Polish journalist to comment on a Cleveland Polish neighborhood: "This is not America! It's Tarnów!" It also led Jews in the Russian Pale of Settlement to greet each other with "Next year in America!" rather than "Next year in Jerusalem!" However, even the mass migrations of Poles worldwide, brilliantly analyzed by Ewa Morawska, wrought only limited changes in the society they left. Return migrants could not influence larger social structures, and often were content with visible consumption. Only the much larger rural-to-urban migration of the post–World War II years profoundly changed the countryside.[6]

In the second part of the volume, four authors look at internal migration in Germany and the demand for labor that had to be externally met. In fact, the traditional artisanal migrations were internal to a central European German-language craft and town culture, extending beyond areas settled exclusively by Germans. Subsequently, as Horst Rössler shows, such migrations were continued by skilled workers. The growth of urban areas and the formation of company towns in the settling of the rapidly changing agricultural areas are the subject of the studies by James Jackson and Susanne Meyer. Karl Barfuss's study of the in-migration of Polish and Ruthenian workers to Bremen and its surroundings from 1884 to 1914 concludes this section and posits the existence of ethnic substratification in a native-born labor force.

From the artisanal migrations of earlier centuries, in the nineteenth century the tradition of taking to the road was transferred to workers, their organizations, and trade unions. Migration was undertaken before "strikes" were widely practiced and before trade organizations had been established. Aims varied: to spread ideas of solidarity, to exert a (limited) control over labor markets, to resist exploitative employer demands, and to ease the strain on strike funds. Workers' migrations indicated resistance to poor working conditions and low wage levels. Collective withdrawal of parts of the labor force was a means of struggle. Thus, as Horst Rössler argues, travel aid was more important than other aid features of organized labor. Regional disparities could be eased in this way. But when disparities appeared elsewhere,

6 Dirk Hoerder, "Labour Migrants' Views of 'America,' " *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 35 (1992): 1–17; essay by Mary Cygan in Dirk Hoerder et al., eds., *Roots of the Transplanted* (New York, 1994).

the migrants had no sensible destination – in periods of general recession or structural crisis, migration could not alleviate unemployment or underemployment. Furthermore, by bringing in migrant workers to undercut labor's demands, employers could turn migration to their advantage. Rössler's case study of Germany is supported by research in trade union-assisted emigration from England and Scotland. His emphasis on the differences of behavior and strike strategies between single, mobile and married, and settled workers is supported by a study of labor militancy in Marseilles.[7] In the 1850s migration still could be used as a form of resistance; by 1900 it was more a program of keeping the surplus labor on the move.

Although better labor markets were the primary destination for migrants in search of support for themselves and their families, the visible physical setting and associated urban concentrations have received more attention from historians. These were, of course, shaped not only by migration but also by investment and natural resources or transport facilities. Duisburg, at the confluence of the Rhine and Ruhr Rivers, provides the setting for James H. Jackson, Jr.'s study of gross and net migration flows in preindustrial and industrial eras. Economic cycles, new realities in the farm economy of the surrounding countryside, and the coming of heavy industry established the framework. But religion, family status, and gender determined migration rates and, in conjunction with family relations and personality factors, determined who migrated, who stayed, and who migrated repeatedly. With unusually rich sources, the author illustrates the high mobility of people in preindustrial times as well as the local roots of the majority of the migrants in a circle of 150 kilometers in the 1860s and – with a slight increase of average distance per migrant from 105 to 118 kilometers – in 1890. But in later years, the "locals" could no longer meet the demands of the labor markets. By 1910 foreigners accounted for one out of every ten Duisburgers. In addition, this local migration was – for some people – one of several stages in the process of international migration.

While Duisburg was about to celebrate its four hundredth anniversary, planners in Hanover decided to add a town to a recently established mine and smeltery. Georgsmarienhütte, about 120 kilometers north of Duisburg, was established in 1860 and within a decade grew to 1,600 inhabitants. Susanne Meyer studies this industrial island surrounded by an agrarian

7 John H. M. Laslett, *Nature's Noblemen: The Fortunes of the Independent Collier in Scotland and the American Midwest, 1855–1889* (Los Angeles, 1983); William H. Sewell, Jr., "Natives and Migrants: The Working Class of Revolutionary Marseilles, 1848–1851," in Dirk Hoerder, ed., *Labor Migration in the Atlantic Economies: The European and North American Working Classes during the Period of Industrialization* (Westport, Conn., 1985), 225–52.

ocean. Skilled miners and foundry workers were needed as were large numbers of unskilled and semiskilled construction workers. Just as for East Elbia, Poland, and the Duisburg area, a detailed analysis of social structure and changing patterns of production explains which socioeconomic groups were prone to leave home for industrial workplaces. Almost 70 percent came from below-subsistence plots and ranked socially below independent peasants. This new industrial center provided an alternative to overseas migration. In fact, the geographical distance of rural work from industrial work was so short that flight from agriculture did not necessarily involve migration but might have required simply a daily commute. Skilled workers had to be imported over medium distances from the mines in the Harz Mountains. These, however, were hard-rock miners and reluctant to change to coal. Consequently, the factory had to begin to train local men. One result of this development was the feminization of agriculture. The tiny plots were worked by wives, children, and sometimes by hired boys and girls. Another result was the increasing monetarization of economic relations through an influx of cash from wages. These changes did not imply higher standards of living; industrial workers were as bad off as agricultural laborers and smallholders. Thus, many workers continued to debate the opportunities provided by overseas migration.

Where wages were low and working conditions extremely poor, employers were unable to attract labor from either the lowest strata of the immediately surrounding regions or from areas farther away. They then started recruitment in areas where industry offered even less and could not absorb the surplus agrarian labor. Foreign workers from the East were brought in: Poles from the territories incorporated into the German Reich during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; Poles, Russians, and Ruthenians from the Russian Empire; and Croats from Austria-Hungary.

Using textile factories in and around Bremen for a case study, Karl Marten Barfuss analyzes the reaction of trade unions as well as national and local governments to migration driven by industrialization. This inmigration created a conflict for the internationally minded German labor organizations concerned as well as for their immediate constituencies. It also created problems in the relations between private enterprise and governments. On the one hand, employers typically wanted a stable labor force; the government, on the other hand, resented colonies of foreign workers on German soil and demanded a constantly changing labor force. The responses of local governments varied widely: In some places, Ruthenians or others replaced Polish workers; in some, toleration of Polish workers was stressed; in others, paternalistic measures were taken toward foreign labor,

especially with regard to housing. But the general lot of these "foreign workers" was difficult and in wartime it deteriorated to the point where they became forced labor. Beginning in the 1880s, the in-migration from the East initiated a tradition of importing labor that continued for nearly a century. By the early 1970s, however, Germany had switched its reservoir of labor to the Mediterranean basin. Thus, the rotation of the labor force was and remained at the core of governmental policies.

After about eighty years of emigration, 1815–93, the German Reich joined the ranks of labor-importing countries in western Europe: England, France, and Switzerland. While England drew workers from its Irish colony, and France and Switzerland relied on surrounding countries and especially Italy, Germany tapped not only the Italian worker reservoir but also recruited far into the east and southeast. Europe was now divided into a labor-importing core and a labor-exporting periphery. In the German case, foreign workers became forced labor during the two world wars.[8]

The authors represented in Part III focus on questions of gender in the emigration from Germany and other European countries. This subject requires special care since it is not always possible statistically to account for gender differences. Women were, of course, part and parcel of all family migrations. In some cases, such as Duisburg, it was even possible to learn their marital status. Until the 1930s, women emigrants were in the minority; since that time, however, the pattern of migration to North America shows a slight preponderance of women over men. Nonetheless, even before the mid-twentieth century women accounted for approximately two-fifths of all migration to North America. Furthermore, they also had a considerably lower return rate than men.

At the start of most labor migrations more males than females left or were permitted to leave. As a consequence, sex ratios became unbalanced in the society of origin and in the receiving society. Accordingly, those looking for jobs in international labor markets had to turn to international marriage markets when looking for potential partners. Since much of the communication was by mail, the term "mail-order brides" was sometimes used, either with emphasis on personal letters (Europe) or on pictures (Asia). Eligible women were sent by the shipload to the early English colonies and to French Quebec; later on they were exported for specific groups. What might seem a crude way of finding a partner to the modern observer, be-

8 See the references to the work by Lothar Elsner, Ulrich Herbert, and Joachim Lehmann in the bibliographic essay.

lieving in romantic coupling and conveniently overlooking high divorce rates, was common practice a century ago.

The situational variants that Suzanne M. Sinke analyzes in her essay are neatly summarized in the autobiography of an Italian woman who traveled to the United States in order to join her husband. She left their only child behind with her mother. On the ship she met another woman, accompanied by all of her children, who was also en route to join her husband and thereby reunite the family. A third woman sailed toward a prospective husband she had never met, while a fourth was going to meet a man she had last seen seven years before.[9] Because women had less access to money, that is, to travel funds, or were not permitted to leave on their own initiative, marriage became a way for these women to enter the flow of migration. Both sides of these equations considered their respective advantages and self-interests. When faced with scarce resources, earlier migrants were willing to invest in prepaid tickets to tap the home reservoir of potential partners.

A second reason women migrated was to find work. In keeping with socially ascribed roles, one of the most important workplaces was the home. Immigrant women worked in the growing field of paid domestic service. While native-born North American women were said to shun live-in domestic service because of the constraints on their private lives, for immigrant women domestic work held several advantages. They either used skills they already possessed or improved their "domestic skills"; they achieved control over their income and could start a family without having to rely on a dowry provided by parents; they received an introduction to new life-styles and to a new language; they came into a working life that implied dependence but to a lesser extent than in Europe. As servants or as spinsters in the households of relatives, domestics in Europe worked long hours and were "on call" for the rest of the twenty-four hours. They had no free weekends or afternoons, made do with low wages, and had to remain submissive in their attitude. Given that in North America no expenses for food had to be incurred and that clothing often consisted of their mistresses' discarded dresses, the income–expenditure balance was considerably better than the wage level suggests. Furthermore, given that there was an abundance of jobs, domestic servants achieved a measure of self-determination by leaving or threatening to leave employers who insisted on too much control.

As Joy Lintelman shows in her essay, Swedish, German, and other immigrant women in domestic service combined strategies for a remunerative

9 Marie Hall Ets, *Rosa: The Life of an Italian Immigrant* (Minneapolis, 1970), 162–71.

working life and a satisfactory private life. They were thus able to move between the labor and marriage markets. This observation applies equally to female migrants of the turn of the century as much as to those of the 1980s. Silke Wehner concentrates on single working women. Just as artisans in European villages became the harbingers of urban life-styles, so domestics in America translated the life-styles of native-born middle classes to the immigrant working population.

Until the establishment of women's studies as part of the university curriculum, the study of labor history, with its emphasis on union formation, class consciousness, and male working-class culture, has generally overlooked domestic service. Research on immigrant women shows the importance of domestic service in the house of labor. Most of the tasks combined here – cooking, child care, sewing – were skilled in the general sense of the term; other tasks required some skill, for example, laundry work, whereas some jobs, such as cleaning, required no skill. Arranging for the best position available, via labor agents or informal networks, combined with the freedom to quit and the right to bargain for better wages or working conditions, provided experience in the democratization of work relationships. Finally, the double change in economic status – out of the dowry system in which parents had to invest to get their daughters into the marriage market and into a wage system that permitted young women to develop (modestly) independent economic life courses – shows the degree of change that these women experienced.

The extensive changes that migration engendered is also the subject of a comparative research project, coordinated by Christiane Harzig, on women from German, Irish, Swedish, and Polish backgrounds in turn-of-the-century Chicago. The women were studied first in the culture of origin, that is, in the regions from which migration to Chicago occurred, and then they were studied in various Chicago neighborhoods. The American urban industrial environment brought about a homogenization as well as the loss of rural material culture that might surprise those who argue for the persistence of strong cultural ties. But developments in labor market behavior and changes in marriage patterns present differences from ethnic group to ethnic group.

Migration permitted rational choices between marriage and economic independence, as Deirdre Mageean points out in her summary of some of the major project results. But, on the level of emotions and social practices, many prospective marriage partners wanted little change. Almost half of the women from Zaborow, Poland, married men from the same parish of origin. If rural material culture itself could not be transplanted, persons of

similar socialization were sought out. The separation from the land and from the agrarian pattern of inheritance and family formation permitted migrants to marry younger and – except for Swedish men and women – they did. The Old World status of married women was still a desirable goal in the new societal context. Younger women spent the years between migration and marriage in wage work and after marriage often supplemented the income of their husbands by taking in work or lodgers. Single women, in contrast, could choose from a range of employment opportunities, yet they mostly gravitated to domestic service.

Many of these women contributed to the development of a public sphere in their new surroundings, which was often considered to be the sole domain of men. Churches, schools, orphanages, hospitals, and old people's homes were either organized or supported by women. Women also established recreational, educational, and intellectual organizations. Thus, they helped shape the community as well as their own lives in a way they never could have done in their villages of origin. Even if men dominated most formal organizations, women played a much larger role than often assumed and did so consciously, redefining as they went the boundaries of what was considered their sphere.

The essays in Part IV explore some of the ways in which women and men experienced their settling into a new society differently. Acculturation in the United States or elsewhere or return to Germany occurred after a long process of coming to terms with the new society. This is reflected in the ethnic press, in labor organizations, in the churches, or in the choice to return to the home country. In cases where return was not possible, or the hope for it proved illusionary, as in the case of Jews from Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, the process of acculturation became obligatory.

In the context of increasing attention paid by the English-language press to women and parallel to the emergence of a Jewish and Finnish American women's press, Monika Blaschke analyzes the role played by the German American women's press. The papers were established to create income for publishers and to introduce women to the merchandise of a paper's advertisers. But female journalists were able to fashion lives of their own and these papers fared best when they addressed women's interests on a grassroots level. The press also reached out to women in rural areas. To rural and urban women two models were presented: a traditional one concerned mainly with family life and a modern one that assigned women a place in the public sphere, whether in politics in general or in working-class struggles in particular. As a result, a debate emerged over whether gender or class